

KAINE DISLIKES DILUTED SMOKING BAN

By Jim Nolan

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The Virginia House of Delegates voted 61-37 yesterday to give final approval to a weakened restaurant and bar smoking ban.

The measure now is headed to the Senate.

Del. Kathy J. Byron, R-Campbell, said she opposed imposing mandates on businesses, even though she has lost two relatives to cancer.

Earlier yesterday, Gov. Timothy M. Kaine criticized House Republicans for bucking their leadership and voting for the weakened ban.

The compromise is "not to my liking" and "counter to the deal" he struck last week with House Speaker William J. Howell, R-Stafford, the governor said.

That deal called for a statewide ban on smoking in restaurants and bars and would allow smoking only in private clubs and eateries that maintain a physically separate, independently ventilated area for smokers.

Instead, the House yesterday backed a bill that would allow smoking in any establishment where minors are not present.

Kaine told reporters yesterday that the new bill represents a weakening of the legislation and leaves more Virginians at risk.

"The health of adults is important, too," the governor said. "This was not a minors health bill. . . . It was an all-Virginians health bill."

Kaine would not say whether he would settle for the new bill or veto it should it pass the House and Senate.

In reviewing other parts of his legislative agenda, Kaine said he was "pretty pleased" with the revised budgets he's seen coming from the Senate and House of Delegates and said there is no reason that they should not be completed on time.

The governor again stressed his desire for lawmakers to trim education costs by adhering to his recommendation for placing a cap on the number of support staff positions in school districts, and applying any savings or money that comes from Washington toward helping to bring teachers' salaries up to the national average.

On social issues, he said he was disappointed that certain early-voting bills and an attempt to institute nonpartisan redistricting of the state's election districts had not advanced.

Kaine said the stimulus package expected to be passed in Congress would "provide some very significant relief" to the state, where a \$3.2 billion deficit is expected to increase once state revenue numbers for January are finalized.

